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Paris, March 12, 1959

Dear Mr. President,  
Dear General Eisenhower,

In the crisis that has arisen over Berlin, I wish to point out to you what I believe to be essential concerning the attitude that we of the West should jointly adopt.

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In my opinion, we must not, above all, give in to any ultimatum, especially regarding the movements of our forces and supplies between Berlin and West Germany. We have the right of passage. Hindrance to our passage on the part of anyone would therefore constitute a deliberate act of force against us. We should have to oppose such an act with like means. The responsibility for what might follow would fall upon those who first used force to prevent us from going to a place to which we have the right to go. In my opinion, this is the essential point. It could, moreover, be decisive, for I have the feeling that the Soviet leaders do not wish this situation to lead to war.

Having said this, I do not believe that we should reject negotiation through normal channels on all the problems that the Russians, or we ourselves, would like

His Excellency

Dwight Eisenhower,

President of the United States of America

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Such relations would not, of course, be directed toward the establishment of a common political régime but would be deliberately limited to such practical fields as transportation, postal communications, economic cooperation, supply, culture, movement of persons, etc. But the very fact that contacts would be multiplied between Germans, within and to the benefit of the "German State," would keep alive the hope of the people in their future unity. In any case, such an attitude on the part of the Western powers would give their policy a constructive character.

With respect to the status of Berlin, the following position, should, in my opinion, be maintained in any event: West Berlin is a Western city and wishes to remain so. We could not agree to have it otherwise. That is why nothing would be worse than to let it be assumed that we could a priori consider the withdrawal of our forces. Our presence is a right which we do not have to debate, even if the Russians pretend to waive that right for themselves. If they later propose measures and guarantees concerning West Berlin that actually satisfy us, it will then be time to examine the question of our garrisons.

The matter of "disengagement" would appear in an entirely different light, depending on whether it was a question of controlled limitation of armaments of all kinds over a very widespread area, for example, all Europe, the Arctic region, etc... or of demilitarization,

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to bring up. Not that I have many illusions concerning the likelihood of an effective settlement. However, in view of world-wide apprehension, an attitude of refusal to hold talks would, in my opinion, present more disadvantages than advantages. It goes without saying that, before a "summit" conference is held and even before a date is set for one, a meeting of foreign ministers should be called and be allowed to remain in session for some time. Matters should be carried no further if such a meeting failed to yield good probabilities of agreement on some important points.

With respect to the German problem as a whole, we could not of course abandon the principle that reunification should take place just as soon as circumstances permit. It is on the basis of this principle that we must refrain from recognizing the "German Democratic Republic" as a sovereign state, but, the ideal having been acclaimed and the distant goal designated, the fact remains that reunification is not possible at the present time. For that to become possible, we must either impose it upon Soviet Russia by force—which is not our intention—or Russia must agree to German unity on the basis of freedom, which it certainly will not do. However, while not ceasing to condemn the oppression whereby the communist system is preventing the inhabitants of Prussia and Saxony from expressing their will, we could very strongly and very urgently recommend that as numerous and broad relations as possible be established between the two Germanies.

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that is to say, neutralization of Germany and, with their apparent counterpart, a similar system applied to East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. In the first case, we should have no reason to refuse to engage in discussions. In the second case, we should do it only if the States that are to become buffer States are first returned to their own people through free elections giving rise to the formation of free governments, without which their neutralization would be only a means of tricking us.

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In any case, it seems to me that you Americans, the British, and we French are not in very close agreement in this grave international situation. Of course it is true that, for many political and geographical reasons, we are impelled to consider matters from a somewhat different point of view. However, it is you, the Americans, who at present possess the most powerful means—and by far—of the Western forces. I believe however, as I wrote to you a short while ago, that it is of vital interest to the free world that our cooperation at the world level be organized in the political field—since the questions involved could lead to war—and in the strategic field.

If events should cause you to pay a personal visit to France in the near future, this is a subject which, if you are willing, we should have occasion to examine most carefully together.

Please accept, Mr. President, the expression of my highest consideration and sincere friendship.

C. de Gaulle